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Secretary Shultz

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The Writer and Freedom

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Following is an address by Secretary Shultz before the Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, and Novelists (PEN) International Conference, New York City, January 12, 1986.

I was in Cartagena, Colombia, last month, for the annual meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Organization of American States, a group not especially known for the elegance of its prose, and certainly not much of literary note was going on while I was there. Two days after I left, however, the *New York Times* correspondent reported from Cartagena that:

> . . . scantily dressed women danced the rumba, a local politician made a speech about love and death, proud relatives toasted the author's fortune with rum, and, in the steaming tropical port where it is set, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's new novel was launched.

Probably all you writers have experienced something like that kind of reception for your work. But when Stanford University published my latest book, nobody in Palo Alto even did the foxtrot.

A book that tries to explain economic policy beyond the headlines certainly is not a poem or a novel; it's not far from an essay, though. But I recognize that I'm not standing here today simply because of my achievements as an essayist. Indeed, I can only regard Norman Mailer's invitation to me as another shining example of that charitable spirit for which New York literary circles have long been famous. But it wasn't until I read the *New York Times* on Friday that I realized that I've become the latest PEN controversy. In Norman's world, that's a high form of flattery—and that's how I take it. And I salute you for taking this decision in favor of free speech.

In the few minutes I have here, I want to presume to make a few comments not only in my present official role but also from the standpoint of some other aspects of my experience.

Nearly every field of knowledge emulates—or ought to emulate—literary models of analysis, persuasion, and explanation. Clarity, insight, illumination—these are the qualities at the very heart of every serious intellectual endeavor. Literature is a first order, leading intellectual endeavor. If mathematics is the Queen of Sciences, literature surely is the King of the Humanities.

In my own field—economics—like literature, we think and analyze with metaphor and seek to persuade through considerations of analogy, symmetry, and the beauty of the argument. Even statistics can be figures of speech.

All this leads me to two observations: first, Ken Galbraith deserves to be a member of PEN, despite the fact that he once wrote a novel about diplomacy; and, second, that I regard the creative literary writer as an individual of primary importance for the entire range of thought, culture, and human existence.

So I am pleased and honored to be here. It has been a long while since the International Conference of PEN has been held in the United States. America is proud to have you here. Diversity, debate, contrast, argumentativeness are what we as a people thrive on. So, as individuals, each of you is truly welcome here. And PEN as your collective spirit and organization is welcome as well, for the larger and noisier PEN has become, the more it has been able to do for freedom around the world.

Freedom—that is what we are all talking about and why we are here. And the writer is at the heart of freedom. There is no more striking image of freedom than the solitary writer, the individual of imagination, creativity, and courage, imposing through language the perceptions and prescriptions that can illuminate and, perhaps, change the world. The writer needs freedom, but the writer also is the creator of freedom. No government or ideological system has ever yet succeeded in stopping the writer, although some are trying very hard.

That is why the theme of this Congress is a serious one, and I would like to say something about it.

As you recognize, there is often a built-in tension between the aims of the writer and the very concept of the state. The state aims to provide social order, and the writer aims to create an imaginative order of his own. Sometimes their relations are amicable, and the tension can be creative rather than

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oppressive. In an enlightened society, the writer is free to pursue his thoughts, to offer new visions.

At other times, relations between the writer and the state may be strained, even hostile. And when the state falls short, as it is bound to do, writers and intellectuals become its most articulate and forceful critics—the conscience of society. Here in America, the literary vision of the 1940s and the 1950s—both black and white—affected public attitudes and perceptions in ways indispensable to the epic political and social achievements of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

But the conflict between the writer and the state can assume vastly different forms. One of the first responsibilities of intellectuals everywhere is to think clearly, to make distinctions. That responsibility is especially serious when it comes to thinking about politics. It seems to me that if the history of the 20th century teaches anything, it is the intellectual and moral hazards of personifying "the state," of divorcing "the state" from its historical and social particulars. That abstraction is morally hazardous because it ignores the fact that states everywhere are governed by individuals who are responsible for their actions. And it is intellectually hazardous because it glances over a number of distinctions between states—distinctions that are crucial to any meaningful reflections about politics and art.

There are countries in which writers know that if their art appears to threaten the political fortunes of their rulers, they may be silenced, imprisoned, even killed. Equally tragic, there are countries in which writers choose to aid the apparatus of repression.

By contrast, there are other countries—and I'm proud to say that the United States is one of them—where writers can speak, write, and publish without political hindrance. Their freedom to criticize the state is the true measure of their independence. To me, the vindication of free societies is the outspokenness, even the obstreperousness, and the self-evident vitality of the artists and intellectuals of the free nations—indeed, in the presence of many of you here and in the very existence of this organization.

So there is a difference. It would be ironic if intellectual freedom were appreciated only in countries where it didn't exist, and taken for granted, or even deprecated, in the countries where it thrives. Freedom is what we are here to talk about, freedom of thought, of expression, freedom from official censorship or private intimidation.

To those who speculate that creativity forged in the crucible of totalitarianism is greater than that in politically free but culturally commercialized societies, I say the answer always is individual freedom. And serious people know the difference between freedom and its absence. To declare one's alienation without distinction is to abdicate judgment, analysis, differentiation, wisdom. It is to risk marginality and estrangement from the roots of traditional and community life that nourish the creative imagination. It can be a recipe for irrelevance.

Freedom is real, and it works. In fact, one of the most powerful trends in the world favors freedom. In recent speeches, and in Moscow and Geneva, I have spoken on the reality that the industrial age is coming to an end. In some places, it is over. The economy of the future will be based more and more on information technologies. And the creative flow of information requires freedom—freedom of thought and communication. Ideology has nothing to do with this; it is just a fact of life.

The societies that will succeed in these years to come will be those that let ideas, people, and capital resources move freely, that encourage entrepreneurship and experiment. Regimes that try to stifle the new information technologies may find themselves falling behind economically, and if they permit them, they risk losing their monopoly control over information and ideas. They probably won't have a choice. It is impossible to stop technological change by political fiat.

It is the democratic societies that have grasped the plain fact that the source of economic vitality is individual creativity and not the state. Countries where the flow of information is intrinsic to the political system and its principles will have the advantage.

Democratic societies understand that cultural vitality springs from individual creativity and not from the state. But information is one thing; knowledge is another. Data and wisdom are not the same.

Emerson said that the scholar is our society's "delegated intellect. In the right state he is man thinking," said Emerson. To me, intellect joined with imagination and creativity is achieved in the situation of "man writing." This means books: novels, poetry, plays, criticism, essays.

In the computer age, reading and writing will not become obsolete, as many have so facilely asserted. In this era of other arts—film, dance, painting, music—there is no escaping the reality that our culture is built upon, and relies upon, the written word. As Jorge Luis Borges has said, "Books will never disappear. It is impossible for it to happen. Of all mankind's diverse tools, undoubtedly the most astonishing are his books. If books were to disappear, history would disappear. So would men," he said.

Indeed, the awesome power of the writer resides in the fact that it takes only paper and pencil to do it. No apparatus, consensus, or license is required. Traditional Chinese tales tell of the village papercatcher, the one designated to go about gathering up any stray scrap of paper with writing on it that might be blown along the alleys by the wind—not for the purpose of cleaning up litter, but because writing was precious, and one single piece of paper might be found to contain an enlightening thought which, however fleeting, must not be lost.

That is why, to me, the horror at the core of George Orwell's *1984* is the suggestion that a tyranny might someday arise that could deprive the individual even of the simplest tools of per and paper. And that is why I am proud to represent an Administration that more than any in this century is committed in philosophy and in fact to reducing the intrusion of government into the lives, minds, and livelihood of the individual.

And I would like to say, in that connection, particularly since the McCarran-Walter Act and its administration have been raised so forcefully at the beginning of this session, to make a comment about that, a considered comment.

The United States is the most open society in the world. Of course, we are not perfect, and I know that some of your members have been particularly aggravated by problems some writers have had in obtaining visas as a result of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952.

This Administration is committed, and I am personally committed, to protecting free expression of all political ideas. We agree with PEN's charter when it states that: "Literature, national though it be in origin, knows no frontiers." In fact, we would apply this principle to all forms of expression. America's dedication to the principle is unsurpassed in the world today.

I've taken very seriously my Department's role in reviewing proposed visa denials that could affect free ex-

pression. It has never been the approved policy of the United States to deny visas merely because the applicant wants to say that he disapproves of the United States or one of its policies.

I realize that errors may be made from time to time, particularly in the acts of administration. But we have learned over the years how to build protections into the decisionmaking process to ensure that the value of free expression is given due weight. The fact is that in the course of this Administration a significant change in policy has occurred. When a writer or artist seeks a visa for the purpose of speaking or lecturing or performing in the United States, the administration of the Act now involves the strong presumption against denying access for foreign policy reasons. No denial is ever based on a person's abstract beliefs.

I want to make it clear, however, that we will deny personal access to people who aim to undermine our system through their actions, who are likely to engage in proscribed intelligence activities, or who raise funds or otherwise assist our enemies. We are careful in reaching such a conclusion about any writer or other artist, irrespective of his or her relative fame. But occasionally we do so conclude. While those judgments are made by human beings and are, therefore, fallible, they are made in good faith and consistent with established policies concerning our national interests; but we will never deny physical access to anyone merely because of the beliefs he or she intends to espouse.

I think this Administration's policies and protective procedures are now working well. And this gathering is only one of many recent testaments to our commitment to maintain the free marketplace of ideas.

I also agree with your Congress' catalogue when it says that:

> The minimum contract between the state and the citizen is for the maintenance of order: To provide for the common defense and diplomacy, to administer justice, to look to the equality of opportunity and the distribution of income, and to manage a sound currency.

That's about it, in my view. Governments around the world should be criticized in direct proportion to the extent to which they go beyond those functions. So I put it to you that we have more in common than you think.

Let us remember today those writers who exist in states where the typewriter or mimeograph are regarded as dangerous weapons, where writers have no independent right to publish, and where a free press has no free access. Let us work to support the solitary writer in a suppressive society. Let us take heart that many governments and their censors have found that it is not so easy to stop all the writers, every last solitary individual with a pen and paper or typewriter and friends who will smuggle out what he or she writes.

The writer will be the last to be stifled. The writer will always be with us, testing the limits and expanding the horizons of his society.

I am optimistic about the future. As the world gets smaller, the importance of freedom only increases. The yearning for freedom is the most powerful political force all across the planet. You are among its champions. You can be proud of what you have done for that cause.

And don't be so surprised by the fact that Ronald Reagan and I are on your side. ■

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